



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Toward a Structural Psychology of Cinema by John M. Carroll
Bill Nichols

Film Quarterly, Vol. 35, No. 4. (Summer, 1982), pp. 43-44.

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Film Quarterly is currently published by University of California Press.

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best insights. The main problem derives from Williams's somewhat passive methodology: "The method of this book is to take a number of, I hope, fairly representative statements by filmmakers, critics and theoreticians, and to place them side by side so as to bring out their similarities and contradictions." This minimal montage of theories betrays the same mimetic fallacy criticized elsewhere in the book—the naive neorealist or *cinéma vérité* faith that one need only register phenomena in their diversity for the truth to emerge. This intellectual passivity is echoed by a weary and listless tone, as if the author himself were tired of pondering the issues raised. Our guide through the quagmires of cinematic realism, we come to suspect, is neither completely in control of his subject nor terribly excited about his chosen territory.

—ROBERT STAM

FILM AND DREAMS An Approach to Bergman

Edited by Vlada Petric. South Salem, NY: Redgrave, 1981.

Of all modern film-makers, Bergman is the most attuned to the dreamlife and related psychological phenomena, so it's not hard to imagine a whole book devoted to the dream aspects of his work. But this collection of essays, deriving from a 1978 conference at Harvard, actually has a number of different foci. In its pages a relatively hard-line Freudian interpretation of the dreams in *Wild Strawberries* (by Jacob Zelinger) can sit beside Allan Hobson's formulation, based on neurophysiological studies, which utterly denies all Freudian dream mechanisms in Bergman or in real dreams either. There are also several articles, such as Marsha Kinder's complex piece, tracing parallels between the different phases of dreaming sleep and film structures: in this case, the opening sequence of *Persona*. Other articles explore dreamlike aspects of one or another Bergman film. Also included are an account of an experiment at the conference by Dusan Makavejev, who spliced end to end a series of nonverbal sequences from Bergman films, and an acute explication of Makavejev's much maligned *Sweet Movie* by Stanley Cavell. There are even a couple of articles on insanity and psychopathology in Bergman.

This multi-ring intellectual circus is presided over by Vlada Petric through his opening

lengthy essay, in which he surveys the entire historical trajectory of thinking about films and dreams, and describes how many different film-makers and schools have used dream-like film styles. It is clear, from the interest stirred up by Kinder's journal *Dreamworks*, that the issues here (for film and for other arts) are lively ones. What neither Petric's introduction nor any of the individual articles quite does, however, is to bring into sharp focus what I take to be the central issue in the new understandings of the dream process being urged by people like Hobson. Unless I misunderstand their position, these researchers have established that the neural machinery automatically throws up a mass of random, jumpy imagery. The "work" part of the dreamwork lies in the brain's effort to integrate this imagery into the semi-coherent patterns we actually experience subjectively. So far, however, there seems to be no workable theory of how this integrating process actually operates. It is easy, of course, to sympathize with Hobson's desire to escape the symbol-mythology and repression-spotting of Freudian interpretation. But it's one thing to say that somebody else's mechanism doesn't work, and quite another to propose a mechanism that does. One reason the matter is of electric interest to film people is that the process, whatever it is, must curiously parallel the work a film viewer does in integrating the material presented by successive shots, and not only in the dense montage context that Petric emphasizes. We know that viewers must learn to "read" the conventions by which film-makers link disparate shots. It may be that we also have to learn to dream. The problem is probably more difficult than the dramatic-explication problem Freud and his followers took it to be. But pretending it's solved, or isn't there, will not profit us much.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

TOWARD A STRUCTURAL PSYCHOLOGY OF CINEMA

By John M. Carroll. The Hague and New York: Mouton, 1980.

Anyone curious to know what contribution transformational-generative grammar can make to film study is strongly encouraged to read this book. The book will not provide the final answer but it gives enough of an indication to either whet or satisfy most readers' curiosity.

Carroll's study takes as its object "classical narrative film" and seeks to determine whether a transformational-generative cinema grammar can be derived that will account for acceptable (or "filmic") scenes in classical films comparable to acceptable utterances in a spoken language. His derivation centers entirely around the organization of shots within sequences, or what Metz would call a syntagma. It involves, essentially, translating the rules of classic continuity editing into the symbol system of TGG. As such it would allow for the derivation of *any* acceptable syntagma rather than the (often difficult) classification of syntagmas into limited types, as in Metz, and although Carroll is on the road to achieving this end, he is still far from conclusively demonstrating its significance as an alternative worth pursuing. The properties and even existence of the diegesis as an imaginary and coherent realm escape his grammar, for example, which takes it on faith that successive shots will remain bound by the specific coding rules of a given diegetic realm. This, however, is not a matter of faith but enunciation, and as such in need of attention. His TGG would apply wherever continuity editing applies, in documentary or avant-garde films, for example, and like Metz's syntagmatique, contributes minimally to the study of narrative *per se*.

Nonetheless, Carroll's grammar does function as a tentative, and partial, but operative grammar. Most interestingly, he cites empirical studies that strongly suggest that grammatically derived units of meaning correspond to the segmentation assigned to a text by a viewer. (These units, again, being essentially those posited by continuity editing "grammar" as well: actions and events rendered with plausibility and coherence.) Carroll also goes on to suggest an interesting link between aesthetic pleasure and the relation of surface and deep structure grammatically, and to posit that some language universals like "Coordination Reduction" have their equivalents in the cinema, thereby suggesting that such universals are not language specific, at least in the traditional sense of the term. As a result Carroll believes film study can contribute to a basic understanding of human intelligence, a gratifying belief, if only he did not, like the Leavis-oriented aesthetes, defend film for its place within a grander scheme in such a way that a vast range of cinematic possibility winds up beyond the pale.

And a grammatical pale leaves much beyond it. Still, it can be defended in its own terms and for what it suggests, and Carroll is quite adept at self-defense. However, he damages his own argument most severely by beginning with two chapters that dismiss virtually all existing film theory as misinformed and inadequate. The tone is belligerent and the prose singsong; it scarcely prepares the reader for what Carroll, with increasing candor, admits is not a grand solution but a tentative beginning. His book ignores currently prevalent lines of study, and instead calls for the incorporation of Chomskyan linguistics and perceptual psychology into cinema study. As such it makes a welcome gesture toward broadening the already wide and eclectic horizon of film scholarship to include two additional fields of study that clearly have something to offer. —BILL NICHOLS

GRIERSON ON THE MOVIES

Edited by Forsyth Hardy. London: Faber, 1981. \$22.00.

Besides immense administrative ability, Grierson had a wicked wit. This he deployed with gusto in his newspaper criticism, along with an evangelical concern with good film-making which could hardly have failed to propel him into production. In the reviews collected here, he deals with theatrical films mainly (though a very early piece acknowledges the superbness of *Moana*), in a slangy, energetic style. "If drama is the overcoming of obstacles," he wrote of a Garbo vehicle, "this is a hurdle jumper's nightmare." He assessed the early Hitchcock mercilessly: never a bad film, and yet "no more than the world's best maker of unimportant pictures." There is a jumpy, impatient intelligence at work in the reviews (they are mostly from the late twenties and early thirties) which make it easy to understand Grierson's greatness as a highly critical producer. A few essays at the end, written later, are more meditative (on Flaherty, Eisenstein, Chaplin) and more mellow. Here Grierson no longer the strict Griersonian activist can write, "And yet and yet . . . I look at it all today and think with the gentler half of my head that Flaherty's path was right and the other [his own] wrong." Grierson was a person who took film with passionate seriousness, tough, funny—a writer anybody who wants to make films should know. —E.C.